

City of Reading
City Council
Work Session
Monday, July 16, 2007

Council Members Present

Vaughn Spencer, President
Maria Baez
Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz
Stratton Marmarou
Dennis Sterner
Jeff Waltman

Absent

Stephen Fuhs

Others Present

L. Churchill
C. Younger
L. Kelleher
C. Jones
T. McMahon
B. Vitale
M. Mayfield
J. Giardiello
B. Reinhart

Call to Order

President of Council Vaughn Spencer called the work session to order at 7:00 pm.

Managing Director's Report

Managing Director Leon Churchill highlighted the report distributed to Council at the work session covering the following:

- Performance measure update – Police
- Performance measure update - Fire

City Park Improvements

Mayor McMahon and Bill Vitale gave a power point presentation on the City Park master plan which will protect, preserve, and improve City Park.

They explained that the plan was developed in coordination with the Penns Commons neighborhood group. He stated that the draft plan will be presented publicly to the neighborhood at the meeting scheduled for July 30 at 7 pm. A public input meeting is scheduled for August 7 and the final plan will be presented on September 17.

They explained that the Park currently has five use zones:

- Monument/passive recreation
- Active recreation/basketball courts
- Playground/passive recreation
- Greenhouse/woodwind
- Rose garden

An evaluation has also been done on pedestrian and vehicular traffic areas.

Mr. Waltman agreed with the scope of the plan.

Mr. Sterner commended those involved in creating the plan. He reminded the Mayor of Council's push for this plan that will make Reading's City Park a crown jewel. He noted Council's allocation of money in the CDBG budget to provide for the implementation of the plan.

Mr. Vitale noted the next step is to set priorities and resources that provide for implementation.

Mr. Marmarou inquired why the Penn Street entrance/exit to the park is closed. He expressed the belief that opening this entrance would assist with egress after events.

The Mayor stated that this study will also assess the condition and reuse of the old Police Academy building located near the basketball courts. He stated that currently the group is investigating the historic nature of the building.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz commended the work of the Penns Commons group and suggested that old photographs be reviewed as the group is considering the improvement plan. She noted that ongoing maintenance could be obtained by adopting sections to different groups.

Mr. Spencer noted the need for the plan to provide for the future needs of the Reading area. He also reminded the Mayor that the plan should

consider the addition of the school at 12th & Walnut Sts. which will increase park use. He added that the Black Top League is interested in using the Academy building for administrative and storage purposes.

Mr. Spencer questioned the color scheme used for the playground equipment. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz replied that the playground equipment installed completes only the first phase of the project. Mr. Jones stated that the next two phases of the playground plan should begin near mid-fall and continue throughout the winter if weather permits.

Ms. Kelleher stated that when the bandshell pond was last repaired in the 1990's basements of low lying homes were flooded when the pond was drained.

Mr. Jones stated that money has been allocated in the capital improvement projects to rehabilitate the bandshell pond.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the repainting of the bandshell. Mr. Jones replied that the back side will be repainted this year and the front and inside of the building will be done next year before the beginning of the summer concert season.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the great color scheme used on the front of the bandshell. Ms. Kelleher explained that the color scheme was designed by Reading artist Judith Kreiger.

Traffic Signal Installation

Mr. Jones provided an introduction and distributed an excerpt from the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Mr. Giardiello explained that there are two types of traffic signals – pre-timed and traffic actuated. He explained that when reviewing requests for the installation of traffic signals, PennDOT requires that one or more of the following signal warrants are met:

- Minimum vehicular volume
- Interruption of continuous traffic
- Minimum pedestrian volume
- School crossings
- Progressive movement
- Accident experience
- Systems
- Combination of above.

He further explained the studies required to determine if the warrants are met. Mr. Giardiello distributed the study results for 5th and Douglass, 5th & Oley, and 8th Street between Spring and Oley. Warrants were not met in these areas; therefore, traffic signal installation would not be approved by PennDOT.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the City's traffic lights are synchronized. Mr. Giardiello replied that all traffic lights are coordinated in some manner. Mr. Sterner requested that Mr. Giardiello check the synchronization of the lights on Spring Street between 8th and 13th Streets.

Mr. Waltman inquired if PennDOT can make an exception to the rules and grant traffic signals in areas not meeting warrants. Mr. Giardiello stated that PennDOT does have that ability but historically they will not allow traffic signal installation if warrants are not met.

Housing Permit Process

Mr. Spencer stated that the Housing Permit Process discussion began when the Housing Permit Ordinance was introduced in January 2007. A subcommittee composed of City officials, representatives of the Real Estate Investment Association (REIA) and the Reading-Berks Association of Realtors (RBAR). These committees discussed the new requirements for obtaining a Housing Permit.

Mr. Waltman noted the need for an implementation process that will address the four categories of rental properties in the City:

- Existing rental properties having zoning and housing permits
- Existing rental properties having housing permits, no zoning permit in zoning districts that allow rental use
- Existing rental properties having housing permits, not zoning permit in zoning districts that does not allow for multi-unit rental use
- Existing rental properties that do not have either housing or zoning permits.

He explained that rental properties that have housing permits but no zoning permit will be forwarded to an Administrative Hearing Officer who will determine if the property meets with the defined criteria. Properties meeting the criteria will be approved; those not meeting the criteria will be forwarded either to the Zoning Hearing Board or to City Council.

Legal Specialist Michelle Mayfield stated that the list of criteria was developed by the Zoning Administrator, Code Manager, City Clerk and

Legal Specialist, using information from various court cases. She stated that the 12 points are required by the Housing Permit Ordinance and 8 additional criteria were added to show that the landlord and property meet good standards and show long-standing rental use.

Mr. Spencer questioned the need for a property to have a housing permit for either five or ten concurrent years.

Mr. Waltman and Ms. Kelleher explained that rental housing in areas that allow for rental use must show consistent housing permits for five years and those in areas that do not allow rental use must show consistent housing permits for ten years. This is to prove the ongoing use of the property for rental purposes.

Mr. Spencer questioned if the process developed will handle the implementation of the Housing Permit Ordinance. Mr. Waltman explained that the process was designed to allow good standing properties to receive a new housing permit quickly and address problem properties at the Zoning Hearing Board or City Council level. He explained that the process as drafted will ease the transition between the old permit process and the new.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed with the intent of the process. She questioned the application of the parking and property maintenance requirements.

Mr. Waltman replied that the criteria listed first on the handout can be changed or removed as the body of Council desires.

Mayor McMahon left the work session at this time.

Mr. Waltman noted the refinement of the criteria listed in the housing permit through constructive debate with REIA and RBAR.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the property maintenance inspection would be performed before a housing permit is issued to determine if existing properties meet City regulations. Mr. Reinhart stated that inspections will be completed as we move forward.

Mr. Reinhart stated that the Codes Department is concerned with health and safety issues.

Council next discussed the additional criteria. Mr. Waltman expressed the belief that these criteria can be defined as the body wishes. The body

agreed that #4 and #6 (property has not had three DCR's in a calendar year and property has 1.5 off-street parking spaces) be eliminated and #3 (no unresolved property maintenance complaints) be refined.

Mr. Marmarou noted his problem with removing the parking requirement. Ms. Kelleher agreed noting the difference between off-street parking availability in R-3 and R-1, R-2 areas.

After a brief discussion the body agreed to apply the parking regulations in R-1, R-1A, R-2 and R-PO areas only.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the submission of age with the tenant list.

Mr. Reinhart noted that the District Justices have requested the addition of date of birth to assist with identity problems.

Ms. Mayfield stated that the City is able to request age for the permitting process; however, the City or landlords cannot base a decision to rent based on the age of the applicant.

Mr. Waltman suggested that the housing permit have an accompanying document where the landlord would sign-off on the requirements listed.

Mr. Spencer questioned public accessibility to the tenant list. Mr. Reinhart stated that the tenant list is not available for public review but is kept in a closed file. There was next discussion on the need for a property manager to be on-site and be responsible for property maintenance and quality of life issues.

Ms. Baez left the work session at this time.

Mr. Waltman questioned the City's ability to add a list of tenant requirements to the leases used by the City's landlords. Ms. Mayfield replied that some Pennsylvania cities do require certain lease terms.

The work session was adjourned at 9:02 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk